United Nations E/CN.6/2012/NGO/57

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
5 December 2011
English
Original: French

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Women in Law and Development in Africa, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-62117 (E) 161211 040112

Please recycle

Statement

Women in Law and Development in Africa, a pan-African women's rights network with members in the following countries: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, wishes to congratulate the Commission on the Status of Women on having chosen as the theme of its fifty-sixth session the topic: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges".

Although rural African women do the most work within families, play a vital role in the development of agriculture and livestock production and manage household and community food security more efficiently, their economic and social status is subject to a number of constraints that minimize the impact of their efforts on poverty and hunger eradication, thereby diminishing African populations' sustainable development prospects.

Despite the commitments made by States under article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, article 19 of the Protocol to the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, rural women still face inequality and discrimination in participating in rural development and sharing in its benefits, as well as in exercising their rights.

Some of this discrimination and inequality in women's family life takes the form of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, degrading and humiliating widowhood practices, levirate and repudiation. In their professional life, inequalities persist in access to resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs and technology and in access to the market. More so than men, the vast majority of rural women are not even aware of their rights and are therefore unable to demand them. Such inequality and discrimination between the sexes are factors that create the most insidious obstacles to poverty reduction and women's empowerment.

Women in Law and Development in Africa,

Considering, therefore, that rural development requires that account be taken of the barriers and inequalities faced by women, including lack of information and knowledge about their political, social and economic rights and about ways and means of exercising them and demanding them when they are infringed,

Considering that despite the progress made, there are still a number of shortcomings in the African countries, notably a phenomenon of political avoidance of the issue and a gap between the policies adopted in relation to gender and women's empowerment and their effective implementation, a lack of gender-disaggregated data to guide policies and actions, limited capacity for coordinating gender equality and women's empowerment and too little accountability and commitment to action on questions of gender equality and women's empowerment,

Encouraged by the results of the programmes that our network has put in place for rural women and women farmers, particularly in different African countries, and their impact on the ability of rural women to fight against violence and other rights violations within the family and to gain access to resources and to community, economic and political decision-making bodies,

Considering that it is imperative, in the interest of sustainable development, that priority be given to actions that address the structural causes of poverty in order to change the relations of inequality between men and women and enhance the social, legal, political and economic status of rural women,

Urges the delegations present at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission to ensure that the agreed conclusions recommend to States and development partners that they:

- Take action to empower rural women in keeping with the regional and international treaties and instruments on human rights, particularly women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Protocol to the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa;
- Give priority, in rural development programmes incorporating women's rights, to innovative approaches that mobilize men and members of rural communities as stakeholders for change and use new information and communication technologies to improve rural women's access to information and technology in all fields, including technology and markets;
- Support and encourage the large-scale replication of initiatives to educate women and community members about women's rights and of legal aid programmes for women in rural areas, as well as any other initiative that contributes to the effective exercise of rural women's political, economic and social rights;
- Promote social dialogue within communities on issues related to traditional and customary practices that prevent women from participating in their community's development on an equal footing with men;
- Accelerate initiatives that help develop gender-disaggregated data collection and use and gender-sensitive budgeting in order to facilitate budgetary planning and the monitoring of budget execution;
- Create and put into operation in all ministerial departments an accountability framework for evaluating outcomes in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment;

Calls upon organizations involved with gender issues to mobilize to hold Governments and development partners accountable with regard to the use of development assistance funds for gender equality and women's empowerment.